

## A CHANCE FOR DOTTIE

Being the Simple Story of a Chorus Girl Who Became a Star, and an Angel Whose Wings Were Singed

"Every time I read of a new starring venture by some unknown actress I feel an acute regret that I am not in on the scheme," remarked a theatrical press agent who helps to exploit stars—for a consideration. "Each announcement invariably means that a new financial angel has been discovered to back the venture."

"There are dozens of men down in Wall Street who wouldn't care to have a searchlight turned on themselves that have aided more than one deserving young female person to advance herself artistically at the expense of several thousands of dollars, more or less. I have seen many angels in my time, but few of them have been good losers. Still, the first affair has usually been productive of plenty of money, though as a rule an angel seldom backs a show more than once, and if he does invest a second time, he proceeds with a lawyer and extreme caution."

"I have in mind now the sad story of what happened to an angel I know, who was interested, in a purely philanthropic way, of course, in the artistic advancement of a beautiful young chorus lady several years ago."

"The chorus person, whom we will call Dottie, because that isn't her name, adorned the front row of a Casino extravaganza when the angel, having several out of town friends to entertain, bought seats for this particular show. The seats were well down in front, and the dark haired Dottie happened to spend most of the evening singing choruses on the side of the stage in front of the angel and his friends."

"The angel, who at that time had not thought of himself in an angelic light, as Dottie has since again to see the show, this time by himself. This visit was succeeded by several others, and after several weeks he began to attend the theatre every night."

"Let any one doubt his motives, I may add that he is a confirmed bachelor, who has no flighty tendencies and rather prided himself upon his sedate conduct and behavior. Generally, make good angels."

"It didn't take the manager of the company long to observe the frequency of the visits of the prospective angel, and as this particular manager made two or three musical productions each year, and always with a different backer to furnish the money, he was always on the lookout for available financiers. He had already run through his list of possible angels without encouraging results for a new production which he wished to make in the spring, and he rightly surmised that the nightly visitor was attracted to the show by some young lady in the chorus."

"Proceeding very carefully, he secured a formal introduction through a common friend to the prospective angel, whose business connections were of such a nature that any attempt at informal acquaintance would have been idle. The following night, when the manager again found the prospective angel at the theatre, an invitation to supper ensued, and the angel was duly guided to a lobster refectory in the white light district."

"Here half a dozen girls from the company, among them the dark haired Dottie, had already installed themselves at convenient tables, acting under the direction of the manager, who was in doubt himself as to the identity of the fairy who served as a magnet for his guest. This doubt, I may add, was dispelled when the manager and his guest arrived and general introductions had taken place."

"A lobster refectory is no place to talk about art, so it seemed quite natural for the prospective angel to get acquainted with the company by a Sunday night social party at a suburban club, where he again met the same party of congenial friends. This function led to similar affairs, and before he fully realized it the sedate gentleman with angelic tendencies was fully embarked upon a somewhat hilarious voyage of midnight suppers and Sunday night flat parties, which he enjoyed himself with marked propriety, and was even voted a 'dead one' by all the girls except Dottie."

"For Dottie had talked of artistic advancement and the difficulties that beset a girl without influence until the angel had about decided to speak a word in her behalf to the manager himself. This he proceeded ultimately to do, whereupon the manager invited him to a business conference in his private office the next afternoon."

"Do you know," began the manager, "that Dottie is gifted with wonderful talent. I have noticed it myself."

"She seems to be a very sincere, hard working girl," replied the business man, earnestly. "She thought if you realized how hard she is working, you might advance her from the chorus."

"I'd like to, honest," replied the manager. "But here's the situation: There are three other partners with me in this show. They have furnished the money to back it. I cannot make any changes in the cast without consulting them, for it would be discharging friends of theirs. See?"

"The angel saw that the only way a man can acquire a pull is to have a financial interest, and he said so. The manager cordially agreed with him."

"Now, you take Dottie," he said. "There's a girl with genuine talent, who ought to be playing parts. Why, I could even make a real star of her if I had the money. Look at Edna May—she was only a chorus girl, too. Why, Dottie is a dream when it comes to talent. If I only had the money—"

"And he paused for a reply."

"He didn't get it that day, but when the prospective angel repeated the conversation to Dottie that young woman proceeded to have mild hysterics of delight, coupled with fearful regrets that she couldn't possibly have the chance because the manager had invited him to a business conference in his private office the next afternoon."

"The prospective angel thought it over for a while, and a few days later asked the manager for facts and figures about making a theatrical production."

"It's dead easy," said the manager. "All you need is a little money to start with. I have a ready-made opera in view—it has a part that Dottie would simply eat up—and then, after we make a hit on Broadway, the syndicate will book us for a long tour. We can clean up a thousand a week clear profit easily—and all on an investment of from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Why, it's a cinch."

"His line of talk impressed the angel, but did not entirely convince him of the wisdom of investing money in comic opera."

He was afraid to ask his friends, for fear of eliciting ridicule. "Finally an interview with Dottie, who had just been scolded by the stage manager, decided him. He went to the manager and said he wanted to talk business."

"I believe money can be made in theatricals," he said. "And I am particularly desirous that Miss Dottie shall have the chance to show what she can do. If she has talent, she shall have an opportunity. Get your plans made, give me a written statement of the money needed, and I will consider the matter."

"A week later the manager had a check for \$5,000 to cover preliminary expenses for the production of the new opera. The angel and the manager met each afternoon. A librettist was engaged to adapt the book of the opera, which turned out to be a Parisian farce, with music."

"The librettist refused to touch the manuscript until he received \$1,000 in cash. A popular composer insisted upon the same terms, and reserved to himself the rights to publish and sell the music which he revamped. Then the scenic artists were called in, and secured \$1,500 in advance."

"About this time Miss Dottie began to talk of a European trip in order to secure costumes for the opera, but the angel balked at this as an extravagance. Instead, the order for costumes was placed with a big department store, which promptly demanded \$1,000 on account, and got it."

"This left only \$500 in the bank, and that went to the artist who made the color sketches for the costumes. The second week after the angel had signed his first check he signed another for \$5,000 for the production."

"Meanwhile, Miss Dottie had decided that she needed a press agent, and the manager engaged me to look after her interests. I took her to a photographer's and had \$150 worth of photos taken. These I began to send to newspapers."

"Some of them printed them. Others made sarcastic references to mushroom stars. Miss Dottie lectured me for permitting the papers to print such unkind things about her, and I tried to square myself with the angel, who knew a few things about newspapers, even if he was ignorant about theatrical affairs."

"The third week rehearsals began. The stage director who was called in to superintend rehearsals got \$500 in advance and \$150 a week while rehearsing. The company was engaged, and each actor immediately upon signing a contract asked for a week's salary on account."

"Some of them got a full week, others only half a week. The chorus girls, who had once worked with Dottie, got nothing in advance. Chorus girls are so unreliable that they will rehearse with several companies simultaneously in order to draw salary ahead of time on account."

"When rehearsals were under way more than \$1,500 had been advanced to the members of the company on account. This, in theory, was to be deducted from the salaries to be paid the first week from the receipts. This line of reasoning led the angel to sign a third check for \$5,000."

"The manager then talked of a Broadway theatre. He reported to the angel that it seemed impossible to secure a suitable house except on a rental basis. This meant from \$2,500 to \$3,500 a week in cash, instead of giving the theatre a percentage of the receipts."

"This money, of course, would be deducted from the week's receipts, the manager said. The angel thereupon wrote out a check for \$3,000, which was two weeks' rental of one of the first-class Broadway theatres devoted to musical comedy. The contract thus secured by the manager stipulated that the attraction could continue indefinitely at this same theatre for \$3,000 a week, provided said sum was paid before noon on Mondays for the week following."

"About two or three weeks later, when things were rounded into shape fairly well, the stage director threw up his job because Dottie kept giving orders to the actors and singers. The stage director knew she was the real thing, because she owned the angel, and he declared that his dignity would not permit him to allow any interference."

"The angel took Dottie aside for a long talk and then prevailed upon the stage manager to stay. That's the way the angel got Dottie elevated to a position where she wanted to boss everything as soon as she controls the money end of the business."

"Then the manager decided that the show must be tried on the dog-up in Rochester or Syracuse, and was sent on to prepare for a three night tour. This meant more money for railroads, and before the players could leave town they had to settle the bill of long standing."

"This meant more touches on the manager for cash, and before the company finally opened in Rochester he had paid out \$1,100 more in salaries advanced."

"The show went on in Rochester and the critics roared it good and hard. Business was something fierce. The manager tried to get more money from the angel, who had a black-out of cold feet and refused to advance any more."

"The show couldn't get back to New York without money, and the manager gave Miss Dottie a heart to heart talk to the effect that, unless she could get the angel to pony up another \$5,000, her chances of playing on Broadway were pretty slim. When the angel understood the extreme urgency of the matter, as Dottie explained it to him, he paid over another \$5,000 on account."

"By this time the angel had paid out \$26,000 and received in return the pleasure of travelling with the company for a first night at what promised to become one of the worst frosts of the season. The total receipts for three nights on tour were \$785, and of this amount the company only received 75 per cent, the local managers retaining the balance."

"The angel saw he was up against it at the dress rehearsal held in New York Sunday night. The show went ragged, every one quarrelled with every one else, the stage director resigned for the seventh time and had to be conciliated, and the rehearsal dragged about 3 A. M."

"And, oh, the horror of that first night! I have seen many fearful sights, but nothing like the horror of that operatic debut had ever before been my lot. I will draw the veil over this portion of the story. What some of the critics said would not bear repetition, and it's best to let bygones be bygones."

"Gross receipts the first week were \$3,657. Deducting the rent already paid, the company received \$657 cash with which to pay running expenses of about \$3,200. This meant a terrible cash loss, which the angel had to make good. To add to his discomfort, the scenic artist and costumers heard that the show was a failure and pressed him to settle their accounts."

"Meanwhile the manager tried to be cheerful, and argued that the critics always roast every new show, and that some of the greatest successes of modern times have been damned the first night. This didn't console the poor angel, however, who was just beginning to realize the trouble of putting on a show."

"The second week business went up over the \$10,000 mark, and the angel was so encouraged that he paid the rent of the theatre for two more weeks in advance. This put him about \$36,000 in the hole, with a slim chance of ever getting back any of the money invested."

"By the end of the second week the attendance began to fall off, and the third week business was very bad, dropping to \$2,100. Some of the players handed in their two weeks' notice and the manager decided to close the show in order to protect what money the angel still had left. The angel reluctantly consented, and they broke the news to Dottie and the company."

"Next day Dottie didn't appear at the theatre and an understudy went on in her place. One of the chorus men was also missing, but nothing was thought of this moment."

"The second night Dottie failed again to appear and the manager sent to her flat. Everything had been stored and Miss Dottie had disappeared. The newspapers got hold of the story and found that Dottie had sailed for Europe with the missing chorus man, whom she had only known a few weeks."

"That proved the final blow. The show closed suddenly, the production was advertised for sale, and when the angel counted up his losses he was down to the extent of about \$40,000."

"But he was a game loser—as game as any I ever saw. 'I wouldn't mind losing the money,' he said. 'I have plenty more, and can get more. But to think of the rank ingratitude of Dottie—that's where the shoe pinches. I honestly thought I was doing a philanthropic action in advancing her artistic career, and she never even thanked me for my pains. It's rank ingratitude, so it is.'"

"The second chapter was equally unpleasant. 'I was hailed out of bed one morning about 8 o'clock by the telephone and told by the detective at the other end that I was to meet him at a certain pawnbroker's at half past 9. I rushed into my clothes and got there.'

"No detective! I told the pawnbroker what I had come for, and he was so mad that I thought he would eject me forcibly. I waited an hour and a half, then went home and telephoned. Official said I had gone to the wrong place. He didn't seem to know where the right place was and I had another lost day to calendar."

"Two or three days later I was sent to another pawnbroker's. This time the detective came and we sat there for hours going over every piece of jewelry in the place and trying to find my lost articles, the pawnbroker as mad as the other one."

"We finally discovered an amethyst chain which I have seen duplicated all winter in the department stores for \$2 or \$3 and which the detective was certain was my property. The one I had lost had been appraised by one jeweller who mended a setting as worth \$500, and another jeweller's estimate was even higher."

"I will relate a little experience which almost finished me. I had taken my little daughter Marian with me to pawnshops two or three times, and she was interested in all the wares, and was, in fact, looking for a ring. One afternoon we were coming home from a matinee, the car was filled with a fashionable crowd going home after the theatre."

"At one end I recognized a man with whose wife I had had a little tiff about a bridge waltz prize, and all of a sudden Marian spoke up—she has a remarkably high pitched voice—and said: 'Mamma, are we going to the pawnbroker's this afternoon?'

"I thought I would sink through the floor. If you could have seen the glances I got, and the husband of my friend seemed so pleased. He had a nice bit of gossip to tell wife."

"Another amusing incident in connection with this robbery, which also explains Marian's interest in our visits to the pawnbroker's, is that her little penny bank, with all its savings, disappeared with the same time with the jewelry as it rested on top of the dresser. Her little sister, Elsie, is the spendthrift of the family and Marian the saver."

"Every one of Marian gets a snow away, and every one of the family, knowing her habits, has kept the bank filled and replenished with Elsie on her extravagance. I don't know what the moral of such a story is, but I do know that Elsie goes about saying: 'Well, I had my candy, anyway, and you didn't get nothing.'"

"It's hard to bring children up properly when such things upset all your teachings. How can I ever convince Marian again that it is wise to save against a rainy day?"

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